Karkalemis/Margiannis Interview

Counter: 000

C: Iw as born in Alexandria, Egypt stin yeah Alexandria, Egypt. My name is Constantinos Panagiotis Karkalemis. <laughing> Mouthful.

I: Yeah <laughing> and what year did you come to the United States?

C: I came in December 1966. It was the best day of my life. <Laughing>

I: Did you come here for school or?

C: I came for, for school. I came for school and I, I had a, I had a friend in my class in Egypt in Alexandria, we were going to Greek school over there, Greek high school and he had a brother that he was already in California and he says well when I finish school I'm gonna go to California. So I said well when you go don't forget me I wanna come too!

I: <laughing>

C: So so when he came over in California and then he sent me after a year I reminded him, I sent him a letter demanding his promise you know so he sent me an application from San Mateo College and they accepted me. So I came to uhh study electrical engineer. And uhh so so I came for school really. And uhh so then what happened is uhh after the semester had finished Iw as uhh, I had a job I was working all night and then going to school all day. Yeah. I, I got a job as a dishwasher on a 24 hour restaurant and uhh restaurant and then I was able to <mumbling> so when the semester was over I, I had already a skill in my hands, I was a watch, watchmaker. I started that before I finish high school, as a hobby so I looked in the paper about a job looking for a watchmaking so I call and I was hired and uhh I was hired as a watchmaker and then I,I tell uhh I told my boss I have to go back to school because that's what I you know. He says well we need you so bad <mumbling> there was some excuse that if you were skillful {014} so my boss went to the union and applied for me to fix my papers and he became his worker and I worked for him as long as he had the store. So so then I went to school that late.

I: Umm ok. How was umm Egypt like, how was life like?

C: Egypt uhh Egypt was a, a big, humongous little community there from 1800s really. And uhh for example {021} a donation from one of the permanent fixtuers that was well to do and should be disposed and donated money. We had a very powerful education system and uhh we lived in the borderline regions, yeah, and {024}. The house and the school and the {025} were able to practice {026}.

I: Umm did you serve at all in the milliary, did they have?

C: No, I was somehow exempt from military because I was a Greek born in uhh outside Greece. So because I never did uhh spend a lot of time in Greece there was never a question about military. In Egypt you had to, you could hold your citizenship as a Greek so I was a permanent resident there and I never was Egyptian citizen. So you could keep your citizenship so when I left Egypt I didn't have to serve

in Greece because I wasn't born there. Now if I was born there I had to show up and uhh and give my, pay my dues.

I: Hmm yeah. <laughing> Umm so are you married or?

C: Yeah, ehh yeah married now about 7 years and my wife she's living in Chicago and she speaks fluently Greek. She fall in love with the Greek language and she speaks Spanish and Greek and sometimes she corrects me <laughing> and uhh she took it very seriously and so she speaks more Greek to my son than than I speak to him <laughing>

I: <laughing> Umm how were your parents were they happy that you came over here?

C: Well my parents they migrated from the island {042} which was the Greek island in the old days and because it was under Turkish supervision there was a little hostility so people left the island and went to Egypt because in those days in the 30s and uhh 40s there were no uhh jobs in Egypt because the the English uhh didn't wanna, couldn't afford any had the controls of Egypt so to speak and then they were a lot of jobs unpromised. So they migrated there and my father and mother were both from this island and they met in the and they married in Egypt and that's where I was born, me and my brother.

I: There's just two of you.

C: Yeah. Yeah they, my mother she didn't have any idea, it was my own plan to leave and come to a better life. Egypt was kind of like good but there was no, certainly it was not futuristic, there was not future in, in the, you couldn't see, I couldn't see myself staying there for too long. So as soon as I finished school you already had plans to go to Australia or South Africa or Greece or some place that I came up with the idea since my friend was in my class to come to California <laughing>

I: <laughing>

C: And that was the best thing ever happen to my life.

I: Umm where else have you gone {057} have you worked in?

C: Well I was in, I have two habits when I came in this country and uh I have music, I just love music and and watch uhh watchmaking. And uhh so I used my habits to support myself and I did work two jobs full time and they both were my habits and I enjoyed doing it because there's nothing better than enjoying what to do. And uhh and then and then after doing so many years I decided I have to find something to substitute both jobs and still do it if I want to as a hobby. So I went to real estate business and that was a blessing because uhh I did very well in real estate and I kind of uhh went to real estate and went back to school and got my broker's license and I've been a broker since 1975. So I sold commercial real estate and that was a hobby also I just I enjoyed fully enjoyed enjoy a ton of taught business and create business and that's how I made my living.

I: Wow. So how long did you, have you been playing music?

C: I've been playing music since I was 15 years old. And now I play professionally as a hobby. Still we have our own band, Mithos Band, you can check him out on the internet. We have a website and we play at the Greek festivals all over from uhh from uhh Arizona to Sacramento and uhh yeah we do uhh play all Greek festivals, weddings, weddings, uhh we play in the birthday, baptisms, you know. And uhh we just enjoy because we make people happy, make 'em dance, so we'll be playing at the San Jose Festival uhh next couple three weeks, the first week of June so if you have time come and experience it.

I: And what instrument do you play?

C: I play the drums. I that was uhh that was the easiest instrument to play because you don't need to rehearse a lot//

I: //Yeah//

C: //so I play the drums and I, I started playing the trurmpet back in Egypt. That was my first love, the trumpet and then I moved to guitar, piano, and then the drums I played professionally the drums for many years. I used to play in the Greek restaurant in Los Altos, we used to play with very famous, they call it {084} well it's not in existence any more but it was, it was in existence from the 60s to the mid 80s and I played there off and on many years. And it did support me for trying to do different things like changing professions and things like that. So yet it was a hobby but it was a profitable hobby <laughing>

I: Umm umm how many children do you have?

C: I have one, Yiannaki.

I: Yiannaki.

C: Yeah, it's Yianni and he speaks fairly good Greek. And uhh he, he's a joy I mean he just, you'll meet him, he'll come running very soon <laughing>

I: <laughing> How old is he?

C: He's gonna be six in the coming August. August 22nd we plan to be in Greece for the Olympics and, and, and then uhh we'll uhh try to attend the opening and a couple of games and then we'll be back, actually we'll be back after his birthday, August 22nd.

I: Oh wow. Is it his, have you been to Greece with him before or is it?

C: Oh yeah we go practically every year we, we baptized him in Greece. We took him back to Greece and baptized him there in the small little church by the ocean and it was beautiful because when we were in Greece and Pamela was pregnant we were swimming and I saw this little chapel right there on front of the water and I said to her when we have the baby we'll come here and baptize him. So we went back after a year and baptized the baby and Yiannaki. Yiannis Panagiotis Constantinos Karkalemis <laughing>

I: <laughing>

C: That's a mouthful!

I: Yeah it is.

C: So his name has my name, he has my uhh father's name and uhh so his name is Yiannis Constantinos Panagiotis Karkalemis <laughing> He'd be sorry about that later.

I: That's a mouthful.

C: That's {103}

I: That's a beautiful name though. Umm and//

C: //and then Yianni for short//

I: //Yes.

C: Like the piano player.

I: yeah, yeah. Umm so umm so with umm {107} was it very difficult?

C: It was hard but it was morbid so. No I didn't and if I did I made fun of it I didn't take it seriously. The world is gonna have that element. But I never did experience anything that made my life uncomfortable and if I did I took it. '85 and I she's with me or my brother in Greece and she's always with us and we take care of her and she's happy, she has her own quarters and <laughing> and, and we spoil her <laughing>

I: <laughing>

C: And we have Pamela's mom too so we all live together. So Yiannaki is lucky he has, his grandma and yeah.

I: Yeah, that's nice to have. Umm.

C: And she's a citizen, my mother she came and passed the test. She became a citizen and uhh she's been a citizen now for 25 years. Oh yeah and she uhh she's in the States, she's with me and if she's in Greece she's with my brother. <laughing>

I: <laughing>

C: It's all Greek fashion, you know?

I: Yeah, exactly.

C: His mother is like uhh it's like uhh always there, you know.

I: Yeah, that's true.

C: It's the foundation, you know, somehow, cuz it keeps you straight and correct.

I: Yeah, that's true.

C: Oh yeah she loves it here, life is so simple here and so comfortable. {134} Very high in the last 20 years but it still there is a bureaucracy element that uhh makes life difficult for no reason so once you get used to here I you go back there and somehow you feel like uhh a little claustrophobia and you feel like every step you make it's a big effort because they make it that way somehow. And uhh it's nice though you get used to it if you stay long enough you get used to it and then you do what everybody else does.

I: Yeah that's true. Umm so what Greek cus-customs do you think that are very important to keep//

C: //Ohh//

I: //to pass down to your//

C: //Oh absolutely. Uhh all the Greek festivities and the holy days uhh and the, it's the foundation and it gives you a good basis for a life and future and unity and all the harmony. Umm just to have a, know where you came from it's a…as for life and all these lessons and all these subjects and we used to take 23 subjects mandatory. It was not pick and choose what you wanna learn and you had so many subjects and you had to pass them all.